

NORTHERN MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECOGNIZES STUDENTS IN NON-TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS

Todd Stephenson of Presque Isle enjoys helping children. From the time he was an adolescent working as a babysitter to his current volunteer work at a local daycare facility, Todd has always been passionate about making a difference in the lives of children.

Todd realized several years ago that he needed a career change. Knowing that working with children was an interest of Todd's, his wife suggested that he volunteer at a childcare center. For ten years, Todd worked for the Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP), working in a variety of settings including volunteering in their Head Start programs in Caribou and working as a teacher's aide at their Washburn location. During this time, Todd and his wife became therapeutic foster parents. For eight years, they welcomed foster children into their home, caring for them and participating in their treatment. In 2004, Todd accepted a position as an educational technician at Zipple Elementary School in Presque Isle, where he worked with special needs children for four years.

Over the past twenty years, Todd has taken classes at NMCC. In 1995, he earned a child development associate certificate. He later decided to work towards completing an associate in applied science degree in early childhood education (ECE) to increase his employment opportunities, as many positions in schools and childcare facilities require at least this level of education.

Todd has been working full-time as a custodian at the Pine Street Elementary School in Presque Isle for the past seven years. Although he doesn't work directly with the children there, he enjoys the atmosphere of being in a school setting surrounded by children. "It's the best part of my day." Todd is currently completing the field experience component of the ECE program at Circle of Friends, a local daycare facility, where he works primarily with school age children, engaging in activities such as reading, finger plays, and a variety of sports and games. "I have fun. I love working with the kids and they like having me come in every day." Engaging in conversations with the children is what

Todd enjoys the most, stating that the children open up to him. "You have to look at them and listen when they are speaking to you." Todd also likes their cooperative nature and enthusiasm about learning.



Photo: Todd helps children play the duck game at NMCC's harvest party held in October.

Although most parents are comfortable having Todd work with their children, Todd has experienced some resistance from others. "Some parents have said, 'He's a man, why is he working with children?', like I have an ulterior motive. But it doesn't bother me. This is what I like to do."

Unfortunately, there is a stigma associated with men working in this field. "Some people think that men are not as nurturing as women, but I think we can be." Todd has also been asked about his decision to enter a predominantly female career.

"People have asked me why I'm not a farmer or a construction worker and why I'm working with kids. I would rather work with children than adults."

Todd strongly feels that more men are needed in ECE and that children would benefit from having a male presence in that environment. Some children may not have a positive male role model in their life; therefore, working with a professional yet nurturing male would have a significant impact on a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Also, because men and women may have different

perspectives regarding certain matters, Todd feels that men can bring something new to the table that may provide further assistance to a child in need.

Todd has enjoyed his time spent at NMCC and is very appreciative of the support he has received from his ECE instructor, Heidi Broad-Smith. “She is very understanding. She has always been willing to work with me to make sure my work gets completed.” Because Todd works full-time, attending classes on campus during the day is difficult. Therefore, he is currently completing his coursework through a directed study. The directed study allows Todd to take a course independently while still receiving instruction and guidance from the instructor. Having this option available to him has helped Todd reach his goal of completing his degree.

Todd has also participated in evening classes on campus and has interacted with his peers. Although Todd is currently the only male in the ECE program, he doesn’t see this as being an issue. “My experience has been positive. There hasn’t been any animosity.” When Todd graduates in May of 2015, he would be content either working at a daycare center or as a teacher’s aide in a school. Todd is eager to find full-time employment in ECE, a field that he truly enjoys.

Throughout his time at NMCC, Todd has excelled academically. Todd offers advice to help other students succeed. “Don’t procrastinate and study hard.” Todd also finds it helpful to get a second opinion on his work before he passes it in to his instructor.

Todd offers advice for males who may be considering a career in ECE. “Just be yourself. Don’t act differently, because the children will know. Be kind, nurturing, patient, and flexible. It can be hard work, but it’s very rewarding.”

For more information about non-traditional programs available at NMCC, please contact Lori Smith, Student Support Career Specialist at 768-2793 or nlosmith@nmcc.edu

**Quick Facts:
Childcare Worker**

Job Duties: Observe and monitor play activities, communicate with children’s parents regarding behaviors and issues, and support children’s emotional and social development.

Skills Needed: Speaking, active listening, judgment and decision making, social perceptiveness, and time management.

2013 National Average Pay: \$9.42/hour;
\$19,600/year

Job Outlook: Projected to grow 14% between 2012-2022

Source: O’NET Online (2014)

**Quick Facts:
Teacher’s Assistant**

Job Duties: Provide extra assistance to students with special needs, observe students’ performance, supervise students in various academic settings, and prepare lesson materials.

Skills Needed: Speaking, active listening, social perceptiveness, critical thinking, and instructing.

2013 National Average Pay: \$24,000/year

Job Outlook: Projected to grow 14% between 2012-2022

Source: O’NET Online (2014)

**NMCC ECE 2013 Graduate Success Rate
(Employed, Cont. Education, or both): 100%**



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